

# Humanitarianism: A Masterminds interview with Stephanie Limage

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BY RAMAN KANG



Stephanie Limage at an IDP Camp in Haiti - Pictured: Four Haitian women smiling, one is holding a baby and Stephanie Limage is on the right with a pink head scarf, sunglasses, and a camera hanging from her neck.

Stephanie Limage knows what it's like to go to bed hungry, not to know where you're going to live, to be on a mat on a floor at a shelter, and then have your stuff stolen later. She knows what it's like to go to the welfare office and have to start over again. "Sadly, there is a shame and stigma

privileged circumstances; however, she's undoubtedly created them for herself. As a social entrepreneur and CEO and Founder of Limage Media Group, Stephanie has been using the difficult circumstances she's been through to help others for over 17 years. "You can't forget the things you've been through because those things can help people. If you can overcome those circumstances, there's a lot of healing we can receive when we use our experiences to contribute to the betterment of other people's lives, it can help you as well without even knowing it," she says. Her latest startup, Give + Share Humanitarian Software, helps connect people to resources, such as finding low-cost meals and shelters in Vancouver - and soon the rest of Canada. "This system has a free version as well as a licenced version and acts as a central database for resources, training, governance, and real-time monitoring, which in turn creates more social impact," says Stephanie.

The idea for the software and mobile application originated when Stephanie was living in Haiti. During her time there, she developed a grassroots in-house CRM and ID system to identify marginalized individuals to have their voices heard regarding their human rights and have them exist within governmental systems. "Many people are born into circumstances where they cannot obtain personal identification, which makes it difficult for them to vote or stand up for their rights," says Stephanie. She set up the initial system to document individuals she was filming and interviewing in Haiti. Her work centred on humanitarian projects and how the individuals in those communities observed the flood of humanitarian organizations after the 2010 earthquake, how they saw funds being spent, and

to be updated on the humanitarian infrastructure and best practices. Cue *Give + Share*, the software provides resources to organizations to mitigate risks during and after an urban humanitarian crisis - like COVID-19. The program works by giving frontline workers and organizations templates on adopting humanitarian best practices and has downloadable maps and resources to find food and shelter that employees can use to give to people who need it. Early in 2020, Steph digitally mapped the food system in Vancouver to get a clear picture of the food security situation as the pandemic was in full force. Specifically, she was concerned for those who were already struggling in the Downtown Eastside. Through a collaboration between the City of Vancouver and Limage Media Group, the two entities were able to mitigate risks surrounding food security, develop static maps that are now available in five languages (Punjabi, Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese and English), and are accessible for those who are visually impaired - thus catering to diverse demographics. By providing printable maps for NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and NPOs (Non-profit Organizations), people who do not have access to the internet can still access these resources. The mapping project was organically turned into the prototype for *Give + Share*.

*Give + Share* is guided by four principles (adopted by the United Nations General Assembly): Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality and Independence. "To achieve these principles, organizations and governments need to have the infrastructure in place to ensure that the most vulnerable have access to the resources they need," says

are entitled to in a streamlined fast-track.

The program, the first of its kind, is currently in its alpha stages and consists of several modules, including the food

and shelter, as well as a module that uses AI to create IDs for people, much like the concept Stephanie used in Haiti but with more technological advancements from her prior system. Each software and mobile application module is meant to be released slowly to the public and strategically to work out the bugs while conducting research and consulting with stakeholders. Stephanie decided to release the food and shelter modules first because it assists in solving a significant problem immediately, all while Stephanie and her team continue to do research and development. “It’s not just this big cluster that’s being thrown out there. This is a very well thought out methodical process that is being deployed in sequences so that long-term sustainability and social impact at a large scale can be achieved,” she says. A stickler for social science as well as research and development, Stephanie says a lot of research has gone into *Give + Share*, from the adoption of technology to having proper case studies, analysis, and science to back up arguments to be able to show the before and after results in a concrete way. “It’s important to do the research and get to know the people you’re hoping to help, serve and support,” says Stephanie. There is both a free version and a licensed version of the modules. The licensed version is more robust, the idea being organizations or the general public can test out the free version. If they like it, they can licence the more advanced version with several customizable modules to further their impact. “It is accessible and affordable, and

The food and shelter modules are currently being deployed with a Vancouver-based inner-city humanitarian organization as a prototype. Since the organization has multiple temporary shelter locations and is widely known, it made for a good starting point and is also really close to Stephanie's heart, having stayed at their shelters in her youth. When she was staying in shelters, she began working within the Downtown Eastside after a pastor told her to stop feeling sorry for herself and do outreach with her. Seventeen years later, she may not be using shelters anymore, but she's still working with them to continue the outreach. Once the research and development phase is over for the modules, Stephanie and her team will then roll out the beta version of the program within that user group and expand the program to a few more agencies.

"Everything I've ever done and everything I've ever built has been part of a long game strategy," says Stephanie. *Give + Share* is just that - a long game strategy.

"We have a responsibility to care for those around us in our society, especially here in Canada where we have a plethora of resources and wealth. It is only fair and equitable to ensure we care for others and the most vulnerable to raise them up as I was raised up through the support of community resources," says Stephanie.

Humanitarian action is a significant component of *Give + Share* and why Stephanie is doing this - to save lives, alleviate human suffering, and mitigate the economic and social impact of disasters such as COVID-19. "Humanity means that human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found, with particular attention to the most vulnerable, leveraging *Give + Share's* technology supports the basic

Looking in from the outside, it seems as though Stephanie has a lot going on, but look closer, and you'll see her amazing team. Through delegation, communication, and

management, Stephanie can get her ideas across to others, allowing them to carry on her vision with their unique gifts and talents. She inspires her team to continue doing a good job and working together to achieve common goals while supporting one another. By outsourcing a majority of her tasks, Stephanie can live a healthy, stable life. "I think as you get older and if you're a healthy high functioning individual and you have the right support, then there's nothing that can really hold you back from achieving what you're built and designed to do. Who wouldn't want to get up every day walking into who they are designed to be?"

Making a social impact is what makes it worthwhile for Stephanie to get out of bed every day. "I feel that sometimes in life we go through circumstances and it's during those difficult times that we can choose to look at it as an experience to develop our character and see how we can overcome adversity and then utilize that experience to help others later," she says. Through the support of the community, friends and relationships have helped Stephanie stay organized and disciplined about her physical, mental, and emotional well-being. She asks for support when she needs support - that's how Stephanie found herself in the Mastermind programme after meeting Nicola Jones-Crossley, Executive Director of Women in Tech World - a spot had just opened up, and Stephanie took it.



high functioning individual and connect with other high functioning individuals is a real blessing in my life," she says. Stephanie is used to being in really highly competitive environments, which generally does not

create friendship, so the Mastermind programme was a massive change. "The other women in the group are really collaborative and have been down to support each other, which has been super refreshing," she says. "You can't just walk into a successful company and ask them what their secret is," says Stephanie. However, through the mastermind, you can learn from other people's success. Through Mastermind, Stephanie found a group of people who can walk with her and hold her accountable and act as sounding boards while supporting each other to expand networks and share resources. "Being an entrepreneur is already difficult enough. You're inventing, creating, you're innovating, and putting yourself out there in a capacity that can be uncomfortable, so competition can create a culture that isolates the entrepreneur even more," explains Stephanie. "When you have a community of like-minded individuals around you, that's a win because that's the only way you're going to sustain and maintain your mental health and achieve your goals," says Stephanie.

Stephanie has been navigating her way through this ecosystem by having a solid circle of support and distributing 10 percent of her income into her projects. Every month Stephanie gives to organizations close to her heart and where she sees the most need. When it gets beyond her means, she asks the community for support. This is her call to action. She wants to encourage others



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and achieve their goals. “There are so many organizations that need to be built up - grassroots organizations that are doing new things in new ways during a time where we need to pivot and help those who need help,” says

Stephanie. “If we don’t pivot, we won’t succeed, and we need to think differently right now.”

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